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Fifty-seventh year

Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations: cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Question of Palestine

Development in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security

Questions relating to information

Letter dated 2 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to Your Excellency herewith the following documents of the third session of Ministers of Culture of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held in Doha, State of Qatar, during the period 29 to 31 December 2001:

(a) Text of the statement of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the Ninth Islamic Summit Conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, at the opening of the session (annex I);

(b) Text of the Final Communiqué (annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 21 (d), 25, 33, 41, 69 and 90, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nassir Abdulaziz **Al-Nasser**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I to the letter dated 2 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic]

Your session is being held under international circumstances, negative impacts and repercussions of which are reflected on lifestyles and the system of values and concepts. This, in turn, makes it imperative for all of us to explore the right ways of dealing with these conditions and the challenges they pose to our Islamic nation and to try to project the true image of Islam and Muslims, in a way which unequivocally reflects the true spirit of Islam and its sublime teachings, thereby enabling Muslims to face up to these challenges with the utmost consciousness and awareness. Hence the importance of speeding up the implementation of the cultural strategy for the Islamic world, which your esteemed session places at the top of its priorities and which we deem to be a vital step in the right direction towards affirmation of the collective will of the nation and striving to resume its cultural and civilizational role in communication and dialogue with other cultures at a time when some erroneous concepts have emerged regarding the inevitability of the clash of cultures and the isolation and renunciation of the other.

Hence, we repeat our call for a dialogue of cultures, without which humanity will not be secure nor peace prevail.

It is imperative upon us to embark on rectifying the distorted and false images of Islam and Muslims in order to be able to enhance mutual understanding, especially since of late many people are propagating such ideas extensively in intellectual and media circles, particularly in the West. This responsibility requires us to make use of all our potentials to develop a positive and frank dialogue with members of other civilizations with the objective of conveying to them a clear picture of Islam and Islamic culture. We may have to draw on the achievements of the communications and information revolution, and in particular the vital role being played by satellite channels in forming cultural awareness and influencing public opinion in different countries and nations. We have to put among our priorities for joint Islamic cultural action the setting up of an Islamic satellite channel, as an essential means of communication and dialogue with other civilizations that would be accessible to various Islamic schools of thought and cultural theories.

We have also to make use of all the means available to us. We have emigrant Muslim communities all over the world to whom we have to extend our hands and with whom we have to communicate, and through whom we can address those of other cultures amid which those emigrant Muslims live. The knowledge and capabilities as well as the ties those communities have with their Muslim nation have made them the window through which other cultures view Islam.

We have to break the hateful link which some prejudiced quarters try to establish between Islam and terrorism, and we must work in all earnestness to correct the unfair stereotyped image attached to Muslims and explain the true principles of Islamic culture.

I should also like to underline the necessity of standing up against the practices of the Israeli occupation forces against the unarmed Palestinian people, the flagrant violations against its cultural and educational institutions and the destruction and

confiscation of its property, shrines and historical and archaeological sites in all the occupied Palestinian territories.

We should like to express our thanks for the valuable efforts being exerted by His Excellency President Abdullah Wade, President of the fraternal Republic of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs.

It is my pleasure also to commend the considerable achievements of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the service of its Islamic nation.

You are most welcome in Doha, and I wish your session all success. May the Peace, Mercy and Blessing of God be upon you.

Annex II to the letter dated 2 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Final communiqué of the third session of Ministers of Culture of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Doha, 29-31 December 2001)

Under the august sponsorship of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the Ninth Islamic Summit Conference; at the invitation of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); and in cooperation and coordination with the Government of the State of Qatar and with the secretariat of the Ninth Islamic Summit Conference, the Islamic Conference of Ministers of Culture held its third session, generously hosted by His Highness, in Doha from 14 to 16 Shawwal 1422 a.h., corresponding to 29 to 31 December 2001 a.d. The opening ceremony of the Conference was attended by His Highness Sheikh Jasim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, heir apparent of the State of Qatar; the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the country's Emir, honoured the session by chairing its opening meeting. In his opening statement he pointed out that the session was being held under international circumstances whose negative repercussions were reflected in lifestyles, value systems and ways of thinking, thus making it imperative for all to explore effective means of dealing with those circumstances and the challenges they posed to the Islamic nation.

He said that it was essential to correct the distorted and false image of Islam and Muslims so as to enhance mutual understanding, especially since of late many people were widely propagating such images in intellectual circles and the media, particularly in the West. It was therefore imperative to make use of all available potential to develop a positive and frank dialogue with members of other civilizations so as to convey to them a clear picture of Islam and Islamic culture.

He also underlined the necessity of standing up against the practices of the Israeli occupation forces against the unarmed Palestinian people, the flagrant violations against its cultural and educational institutions and the destruction and confiscation of its property, shrines and historical and archaeological sites throughout the Palestinian territories.

Among the priorities for joint Islamic cultural action, His Highness called for the establishment of a project for setting up an Islamic satellite channel as an essential means of communication and dialogue with other civilizations that would be accessible to the various schools of thought and cultural trends within Islam.

He mentioned the considerable achievements of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the service of the Islamic nation.

The session decided to adopt the statement of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, as one of its official documents.

Next, His Excellency Mr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, took the floor and spoke of the importance of the convening of the third session of Ministers of Culture of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the current stage of developments in the Arab world. The Islamic nation, he said, was currently being subjected to a fierce attack on its values and its historical position and an attempt to destroy its pioneering role in building the lofty edifice of civilization. He pointed out that the Organization of the Islamic Conference had attributed extreme importance to the fundamental role of culture in defining the identity and personality of peoples. He stressed the importance of dialogue among different civilizations and cultures for coexistence, for achieving mutual recognition and for eliminating struggles such as those that had marked the relations among those civilizations down through the ages and commended ISESCO on its achievements.

Speaking of the role of culture, His Excellency Mr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director-General of ISESCO, said that however varied the notions and views regarding culture, its mission in life and its function in society might be, culture was the most vital element in the building of the human being, the growth of nations, the shaping of the future and the moulding of civilization, owing to its extraordinarily important role in directing the human mind, in guiding human thought and in creating powerful, inspiring incentives to effective action capable of bringing change, development and renewal at all levels. In all cases the pivot about which the function of culture revolved, he said, was the building of the human personality.

The Director-General said that every nation shaped its present and planned for its future in the light of its own thinking, heritage and civilization, and the Islamic nation possessed a cultural stock to provide it with elements of strength, invulnerability and permanence, offering it the means and capabilities for entering the civilizational arena, not in order to ignite the flames of cultural struggle or fire a clash of civilizations, but to attenuate that struggle and further the current trends in international relations towards dialogue and communication based on the norms of international law and humanitarian principles and inspired by the teachings of the revealed religions.

His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Achari, Minister of Culture and Communication of Morocco and Chairman of the second session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers of Culture, spoke at the opening meeting, expressing his appreciation to the Emir, Government and people of Qatar for generously sponsoring the Conference. He called for the building of an Islamic cultural system, stressing the need to continue the efforts to resist the savage campaign against Islamic culture, a campaign based on considerable ignorance and misunderstanding and a conflict of positions and interests. He stated that restoring the image of Islamic culture could be achieved only within the framework of an overall project, starting with a reminder of the decisions of the previous Islamic Conference. He denounced the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and called for a revival of the spirit of the blessed Al-Quds intifada to help define the elements of an Islamic cultural intifada of the media.

Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, in his statement delivered at the opening meeting, spoke of the civilizational mission of Islamic Arab culture. He pointed out that its success lay in the fact that it did not reject other

cultures, emphasizing that Islamic Arab civilization had helped to save the culture of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. He also praised the advances in knowledge achieved by Islamic Arab culture.

The history of Islamic Arab civilization, he said, offered an example of cultural coexistence in the world. He referred to the Medellín Declaration for Cultural Diversity and Tolerance, which, he said, provided a covenant whereby one could define cultural practices with a view to safeguarding cultural diversity. He called for the translation of the general principles of that Declaration into concrete acts, urging the UNESCO member States to participate energetically in the protection of cultural diversity and the maintenance of the common heritage of humanity.

He saluted the role of ISESCO as an instrument for a dialogue among civilizations, commending it on the two international symposia it had recently held on that topic in Rabat and Tunis.

In his statement delivered at the opening meeting, Mr. Al-Munji Bosnina, Director-General of ALECSO, stressed the importance of the fruitful cooperation between ISESCO and ALECSO in fields of common concern to them, underscoring the need to develop that cooperation further and use it to serve the purposes of the Islamic Arab nation. Islamic Arab culture, he said, had always been a culture of fundamental constants, foremost among them being acceptance of others, rapprochement and coexistence with them and mutual dealings based on a spirit of give and take.

He pointed out that Islam was a religion characterized by tolerance, openness and moderation that wished for the well-being of all. Even the West, he said, might be the victim of certain of its own extremists. Without a doubt there existed ignorance, either real or feigned, and misunderstanding, and there clearly existed inflexibility, which he and those present rejected. He called for a calm and constructive dialogue in which the starting point would be gaining mutual familiarity on which to build a system for living side by side.

His Excellency Mr. Abdallah bin Khalifa Al-Attiyah, Minister of State and Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage of the State of Qatar, was elected Chairman of the session.

A succession of ministers and representatives of Islamic, Arab and international organizations then took the floor, expressing their appreciation to the State of Qatar and to its Emir and also their appreciation of the invitation addressed to them by ISESCO to attend the session as representatives of member States and of organizations that engage in fruitful cooperation with them. They were unanimous in considering the session an opportunity for the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to give a fresh start to the implementation of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World.

The members of the session examined together the topics, issues and points on the agenda in a transparent, comprehensive view that drew together all the components of the general cultural landscape in the Islamic world and decided to reaffirm their collective will to implement the Cultural Strategy consciously and responsibly, bearing in mind the changing international developments reflected — both positively and negatively — in every aspect of the Islamic world.

The session noted with satisfaction the efforts made by ISESCO to implement the resolutions and recommendations adopted at the previous session, commending the achievements realized in that regard. They firmly resolved to provide further possibilities and make efforts to create further opportunities for fostering continued work in that direction, taking into consideration the nature of the conditions through which the Islamic world was passing as a result of the profound changes taking place in the world owing to the tumultuous events of the previous months.

The discussions that took place during the meetings of the session covered general cultural conditions in the Islamic world, the cultural and media-related impact of globalizing trends on culture in Islamic societies, the resulting diverse and multifarious challenges that tended to weaken the cultural identity of the Islamic nation, the breakdown of the wall of impenetrability in the Islamic world and the subjection of the Islamic cultural identity to intense pressures that detracted from the solidity, permanence, stability and strength of the Islamic civilizational and cultural position.

The participants emphasized the importance of redoubling, coordinating and pooling efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Cultural Strategy and adapt it to new regional and international developments, considering it a flexible plan of action and pliable framework capable of responding to the demands of multi-purpose comprehensive development in the Islamic world and taking into account the differing conditions and multiplicity of political and cultural options in the different member States.

The session, after exhaustively discussing the reports submitted to it by ISESCO on the implementation of the resolutions of the second session; the implementation of the strategy for Islamic cultural endeavour in the West; ISESCO activities in connection with the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001); the recommendations of the specialized committees of the Organization of the Islamic Conference relating to the Cultural Strategy; the distortion of Islam and Islamic civilization by the media in the context of international developments; the protection of Islamic cultural sites and institutions in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; and the demand for the return of stolen Islamic cultural objects, adopted appropriate resolutions in respect of those matters.

The session affirmed the position of the Islamic world with regard to the dialogue among civilizations based on the magnanimous principles of Islam and its teachings calling for civilizational tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect for the cultural and civilizational characteristics of nations. It also affirmed the sincere desire of the Islamic world to continue the dialogue with human cultures, and called upon international parties to be responsive to the positive position of the Islamic world on the dialogue among civilizations and to demonstrate a sincere desire to achieve understanding among the peoples of the world on the basis of mutual respect and within the framework of international law, in order to spare mankind crises and conflicts.

The session decided to give full support to ISESCO in continuing its work of following up the applications of the Cultural Strategy and the strategy for Islamic cultural endeavour in the West. It called for the revitalization of the role of the Supreme Council for Education and Culture in the West and called upon ISESCO to develop a comprehensive concept to crystallize its integrated vision for Islamic cultural endeavour in the West in the light of international variables.

The session charged ISESCO with the drawing up of a detailed programme to counter media campaigns distorting Islam and Islamic civilization and called upon ISESCO to submit this programme to member States for comment. The session called upon member States to participate in this programme in order to refute the calumnies and falsehoods propagated by the Western media against Islam and Islamic civilization and to make the diplomatic missions of member States fully aware of their responsibilities in this matter.

In this context, the session emphasized that the countering of media campaigns that distort the image of Islam and Muslims is the joint responsibility of all member States and for non-governmental media in the Islamic world, intellectuals, scientists, cultural figures and representatives of the press and the media generally. It called upon member States to take initiatives at the level of their media organs, to the extent of their capabilities and within the framework of their information and cultural policies, to participate in correcting the image of Islam in the West.

The session expressed growing concern about the extensive report submitted to it by ISESCO concerning the protection of Islamic sites and institutions in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The session affirmed the need to protect the rights of the Palestinian people generally, which is exposed to crushing colonialist aggression waged against it by the Israeli occupation authorities and the Jewish colonialist settlers in the Palestinian territories. The session appealed to the United Nations for speedy intervention to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people, which naturally includes the protection of the Islamic cultural sites and institutions in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The session stressed the responsibility of UNESCO and the other international organizations concerned with regard to the protection of these Palestinian cultural sites and institutions and support for the position of the Islamic world on this issue.

The session approved the project to establish an Islamic satellite channel in accordance with the studies prepared by ISESCO and called upon ISESCO and the competent agencies in the State of Qatar to follow up implementation of the project. It also called upon member States to provide all kinds of support for the implementation of this important project as soon as possible.

The session addressed an appeal to the Governments and institutions of the international community to strive for the speedy restoration of looted Islamic cultural property to its original owners, in accordance with the norms of international law and in implementation of the right of peoples to enjoyment of their cultural specificities and their right to the preservation of their historic cultural property looted during periods of colonial occupation. It stressed the inadmissibility of the sale of any looted cultural property by any agency or persons and called for the reporting of such cases to Interpol and the State having rightful ownership of such property. It called upon member States to approach Western States in possession of such property with a view to restoring it to its place of origin.

The session adopted a draft programme of Islamic cultural capitals and decided to select the city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah as a capital of Islamic culture for the year 2004, as the first capital to inaugurate the implementation of this programme.

The session charged the Advisory Council for the Implementation of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World with selecting the capitals of Islamic culture

on a regular basis, designating annually three cities of States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference as capitals of Islamic culture.

The session elected the new members of the Advisory Council for the Implementation of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World and expressed appreciation to the outgoing members of the Council. The session affirmed that ISESCO was charged with following up the work of the Advisory Council and continuing to provide it with support in carrying out its responsibilities through coordination with the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The session urged those member States that had not yet joined ISESCO to do so.

The session addressed a telegram to the President of the Swedish Academy protesting the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature for 2001 to the racist writer V. S. Naipaul and called upon the Academy to revise its decision, expressing severe censure of the decision taken by this Academy to award the Nobel Prize to an author who attacks Islam and Muslims in his writings, incites hatred among peoples and stirs up strife between cultures and civilizations, which is contrary to international covenants, declarations and agreements and offends human values and divine principles.

In concluding its proceedings, the session addressed a message of thanks and appreciation to His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Chairman of the Ninth Islamic Summit Conference.